



FLASH SALE

99¢ a week for 2 months

SAVE NOW



LOG IN SUBSCRIBE NOW

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Part of the McClatchy Media Network

Local News Crime Sports Texas Politics Food • Opinion Obituaries Jobs Personal Finance Shopping

CRIME

Women's prison in Fort Worth again 'full of COVID,' 2 die from virus at men's prison

BY KALEY JOHNSON

UPDATED JANUARY 25, 2021 9:11 AM





Protesters gathered outside the gates of FMC Carswell on August 1, 2020, to protest conditions inside the federal medical prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. The prison has one of the highest number of cases out of all the country's federal prisons. BY AMANDA MCCOY



Only have a minute? Listen instead

Powered by **Trinity Audio**

00:00

10 10 1.0x

06:04

Coronavirus cases at a federal medical prison in Fort Worth skyrocketed to the second highest in the country as of Sunday, with 200 women testing positive for COVID-19.

FMC Carswell had the [second most COVID-19 cases out of all federal prisons](#) as of Sunday, behind only Pollock FCI in Louisiana (285 cases), according to Bureau of Prisons data. Carswell is the only medical facility for women in federal custody in the country — most of the women have health problems or are elderly.

At least one of the infected units has been on lockdown for about two weeks since cases started rising, said Sandra Shoulders, an inmate at the prison. The women only leave their rooms to shower, and have limited access to email and phones.

“This whole prison is full of COVID,” Shoulders said. “I was supposed to be going to a drug program, but that’s shut down.”

Shoulders said people who test positive are not separated from those who have not been tested or who tested negative, causing the virus to spread faster. Various units, include one made up of mostly elderly women and women on dialysis, have been infected.

“Negative should be with negatives, positives should be with positives,” Shoulders said. “How are you going to get well when you get kitchen workers serving food, you

got kitchen workers on the med floor and then mixed with everyone? They want everyone to get sick and to get it out of the way. Stop mixing us like a soup.”



According to the BOP’s website, inmates cleared to prepare meals are asymptomatic, screened by medical staff and cleared to work in Food Service. In a statement, the BOP said it is carefully monitoring the spread of the COVID-19 virus and carefully assessing how to best ensure the safety of staff, inmates and the public. Facilities are implementing the BOP’s guidance on mitigating the spread of COVID-19, which can be found at <https://www.bop.gov/coronavirus/index.jsp>.

On Jan. 21, Shoulders said she was tested for COVID-19 for the 16th time and again tested negative. She and others who tested negative were put into a separate unit. But on Jan. 23, three people in the new unit tested positive, said Shoulders, who has been incarcerated at Carswell for two years on a drug-related offense. [She requested compassionate release or home confinement](#) due to multiple serious health problems, but was denied.

On Jan. 14, prison administrators put another unit on lockdown as cases spread, according to Mendy Read-Forbes, who said she has had COVID-19 twice at the prison. Those who tested positive were sent out to tents erected on the prison grounds, Read-Forbes said.

On Jan. 22, Read-Forbes was tested for a third time for coronavirus and tested negative.

“Tomorrow may hold a different result since there is no social distancing in prison,” Read-Forbes wrote in an email. “My frustration comes from the fact that I am a first time, non-violent offender and could do my time on home confinement.”

[Read-Forbes was sentenced to 20 years in federal prison](#) for conspiring to launder more than \$200,000 in illegal drug money through her nonprofit in Kansas, according to court documents. She is currently appealing her case.

She noted that many staff members “have been helpful during this frustrating transition” and help women move their personal items from one pod to another as they try to keep the virus from spreading further.

“Everyone is tired of the coronavirus,” she said via email.

FMC FORT WORTH

Facilities across the country have struggled to contain COVID-19 once the virus infiltrates prison walls. As [BOP Director Michael Carvajal said in a Senate Judiciary Hearing in June](#), “prisons by design are not made for social distancing. They are on the opposite made to contain people in one area.”

To combat the difficulties of social distancing in prison, the BOP has issued cloth face masks to all inmates and common areas are sanitized multiple times a day, [according to the BOP's website](#).

FMC Carswell has already been hit by coronavirus outbreaks. Over the summer, more than 500 women tested positive for COVID-19 at one time. Some women at the prison say they have tested positive for the virus more than once. In total, 725 women out of 1,304 total inmates have had COVID-19 at the facility, according to the BOP.

The federal prison for men in Fort Worth has also struggled with COVID-19 outbreaks. In total, 662 men have tested positive for the virus — 1,231 men are currently incarcerated at the medical prison. As of Sunday, 11 inmates and 34 staff members had COVID-19.

Fourteen people at the prison have died from contracting the virus, including two in January.

[Joe Gary Rivas, Jr. tested positive for COVID-19](#) in December at FMC Fort Worth and was found unresponsive on Jan. 1. EMS started life-saving efforts and took the 75-year-old to a local hospital. He died later that day, the BOP said in a press release. Rivas was sentenced in the Northern District of Texas to a life sentence for conspiracy to import cocaine and marijuana. He had been in custody since 2017 and, according to the BOP, had unspecified pre-existing conditions.

Michael Martinez, 75, died the day after Rivas. He had tested positive for COVID-19 on Dec. 15 and was taken to a hospital on Dec. 21. On Dec. 30, his condition worsened and he was put on a ventilator. He died on Jan. 2. Martinez was serving a 30-year sentence for conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute heroin. He had been at FMC Fort Worth since October 2019.

As of Sunday, 3,540 federal inmates and 2,005 BOP staff were currently positive for COVID-19 nationwide, according to BOP data.

Those inside prisons are [at least 4.77 times more likely to be infected with COVID-19](#) than the general population, according to the Federal Public Community Defenders.

This story was originally published January 24, 2021, 6:09 PM.

RELATED STORIES FROM FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

TEXAS

Armed demonstrators gather outside Texas Capitol to show support for gun rights

JANUARY 17, 2021 3:53 PM

CRIME

Court stays execution for Lisa Montgomery, woman on death row at Fort Worth prison

JANUARY 12, 2021 9:42 AM



KALEY JOHNSON



817-390-7028

Kaley Johnson was the Fort Worth Star-Telegram's seeking justice reporter and a member of our breaking news team from 2018 to 2023. Reach our news team at tips@star-telegram.com

Take Us With You

Real-time updates and all local stories you want right in the palm of your hand.



FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM APP →

SUBSCRIPTIONS

[Start a Subscription](#)

[Customer Service](#)

[eEdition](#)

[Vacation Hold](#)

[Pay Your Bill](#)

LEARN MORE

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Archives](#)

[Sports Betting](#)

[Personal Finance](#)

[Reviews](#)

ADVERTISING

[McClatchy Advertising](#)

[Place an Ad](#)

[Place a Classified Ad](#)

[Place an Obituary](#)

[Staffing Solutions](#)

[Political | Advocacy Advertising](#)

Part of the McClatchy Media Network

[COPYRIGHT](#)

[COMMENTING POLICY](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[YOUR PRIVACY CHOICES](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)

